DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 375 506 EA 026 210

AUTHOR Dlugosh, Larry L.; Sybouts, Ward
TITLE How Superintendents and School Board Members View School Restructuring.
PUB DATE [94]
NOTE 40p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Administrator Attitudes; *Boards of Education; *Educational Change; Educational Objectives; Elementary Secondary Education; *School Restructuring; *Superintendents

ABSTRACT

Although school restructuring and school reform are widely talked about topics in educational administration, a difficulty exists in coming to an agreement about definitions of terms. This paper presents findings from a study that surveyed school district superintendents and school board members from 362 school districts in a seven-state area (Missouri, Iowa, South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas, Colorado, and Wyoming). The purpose of the study was to determine: information about their perception of what school restructuring will accomplish; what they view as important ingredients of school restructuring; what factors will influence restructuring; and what current educational or political emphasis they associate with restructuring. Responses were received from approximately 74 percent of the superintendents and 40 percent of the board members. Findings showed that both groups were in general agreement on issues associated with school restructuring. They agreed about the key words they used to describe school reform and the factors influencing reform. Outcome-based education, strategic planning, cooperative learning, site-based decision making, and total quality management were viewed as the top five descriptors of school restructuring techniques. School vouchers, home schooling, the New America Schools Corporation, and the Edison Project were not reported as terms associated with school reform. In general, officials from smaller schools viewed restructuring less positively than did those in larger schools. Ironically, although most respondents supported the perceived outcomes of restructuring, only slightly more than 4 percent indicated that most or all of the current components of the public educational system needed to be changed. Change may be slow in coming if left to those on the "inside" to facilitate reform. Contains 8 tables and 13 references. (LMI)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 375 506

How Superintendents and School Board Members View School Restructuring

Larry L. Dlugosh

and

Ward Sybouts

The University of Nebraska-Lincoln

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☒ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

L. Dlugosh

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)"

Running Head: Views of School Restructuting

EA 026 210

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

HOW SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENTS AND BOARD MEMBERS VIEW SCHOOL RESTRUCTURING

Introduction

Reforming education is not a new topic in the United States. From the time of Horace Mann and Thomas Jefferson and through the twentieth century, with the leadership of persons like John Dewey and President Elliott of the National Education Association, efforts have been made to reform and improve the educational system of our nation. The Progressive Education Movement of the 1930s, the NASSP Trump Plan of the 50s and 60s, and the emergence of federal categorical funding are illustrations of continued efforts to improve education and, ultimately, our society.

"The first stirrings of a new wave of educational reform," according to McCune (1987), "became visible in the early 1980s when state leaders, primarily governors, were beginning to experience slowdowns in their state's economies" (p. 1). The popular press fed the fires of interest as a prelude to the publishing of A Nation At Risk (The National Commission on Excellence, 1984), which was followed by "report after report from diverse national commissions calling for reforms in the nation's schools to stem what was described as a rising tide of mediocrity" (Green, 1987, p. 3). The authors of the reports addressed subjects from economic competitiveness to teacher empowerment, as well as the preparation of citizens to live in an ever-changing social and political environment. Then, as now, the environment in which the schools were allowed to operate was rapidly becoming post-industrial, technology rich, and information driven. Society was changing and many observers and politicians raised the question, "Could

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

the public schools change in significant ways to better prepare new generations for the new world?"

Perhaps one of the difficulties of the school reform movement is coming to an agreement about definitions of terms. For example: "reform," "restructure," "reconfigure," and "improve" may all be perceived as synonymous when engaging in the rhetoric of change for the public school system. School reform may be in the eye of the beholder. The National School Boards Association developed materials to guide school board members and administrators toward achieving "educational excellence" (Van Loozen, 1984, p. 3). Deal and Bolman (1991) used the word "reframe" as a metaphor for school reform Other definitions from recognizable authorities in the educational-political arena follow:

"Restructuring—reconfiguring the basic functions, operations, and organization of schools" (American Association of School Administrators, 1991, p. 1).

"[Restructuring] A new metaphor for educational change that conveys the image of starting anew, of changing not only content but also form, of shifting from tinkering with the old order to inventing a new order founded on new assumptions, values and vision." [Moorman and Egermier, 1992, p. 15).

"[Restructuring] A 're-invention of American Education'—the creation of a total new generation of schools for America's children" (Seely, 1992, p. 5).

"Reform: A systemic approach to improving education; a comprehensive, coordinated, long-term, strategy to change the education

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

system, not just one or two pieces of it" (Education Commission of the States, 1992, p. 6).

The application of systems theory as reflected in the document of the Education Commission of the States was consistent with Sarason (1990) who has discussed at some length the view that it is only possible to bring about substantive change in education if all major segments, or sub-systems, of the total system are encompassed in the change process. The concepts presented by Sarason have been extended into planning processes designed to encompass all major sub-systems of a larger entity for the purpose of school reform or restructuring (Fullen and Miles, 1992; Sybouts, 1992). Piecemeal changes or changes that encompass only a selected segment of the total educational system will not bring about educational reform.

When viewing the constant stream of articles and commission reports in which the authors have called for reform of education and supported their contentions with often scathing assessments of the public schools, there is little doubt that school reform is wanted and needed immediately. In May 1993, the results of a survey conducted by Parade Magazine (Clements, 1993) were reported in which "63% of Americans rate the quality of public education as fair or poor" (p. 4).

By observing recent legislation at the state and federal levels; by reviewing the topics presented in various educational, legislative, technology, and business conferences and conventions; or by scanning the topics that have appeared in educational journals and monographs, the wave of interest in educational reform is abundantly clear. The questions remain: "What will school restructuring accomplish? What factors are needed to foster school

reform? What political, social, and educational forces will influence school reform? Which of the current approaches to restructuring education are seen as being related to changing education? How extensive are the needed changes in education? What impact will restructuring have on the educational scene? To gain a better understanding of the existing condition of reform within the educational establishment, it was determined that school superintendents and board members could provide some insights into the status of school reform.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose for conducting this study was to gather information from school board presidents and superintendents of schools about their perceptions of school reform to determine (1) information about their perception of what school restructuring will accomplish; (2) what they viewed as important ingredients of school restructuring; (3) what factors will influence school restructuring; and (4) what current educational or political emphases they associated with restructuring.

Research Methods

In an effort to gain a better understanding of how school superintendents and members of boards of education perceived school restructuring, a survey was developed and sent to officials in a seven-state area which included Missouri, Iowa, South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas, Colorado, and Wyoming. Questionnaires were mailed to 362 districts in January 1993. Responses were received from 73.5 percent of the district superintendents and 39.8 percent of the school board members.

Insert Table 1 about here

School size was also a consideration in drawing the sample. As reported in Table 2, school sizes ranged from very small K-12 districts to those in which there were over 5,000 students. The three largest responding districts had enrollments of 21,198, 22,468 and 29,960.

Insert Table 2 about here

Findings

What Will Restructuring Accomplish?

Superintendents and school board members were asked what school restructuring would accomplish and to what extent they saw school restructuring leading to selected educational outcomes. The respondents were given a scale to report their personal perceptions of the impact that restructuring would have with respect to the selected outcomes. The scale included: (0) will have no influence; (1) will have a small influence; (2) will have a moderate influence; (3) will have a significant influence; and (4) will definitely accomplish the stated goal. The superintendents and school board members responded to the following questions.

Will school restructuring improve the preparation of students to enter the world of work? Approximately half of the superintendents and school board members (47%) felt restructuring would have a "significant influence" on improving the students' level of preparedness to enter the world of work

and approximately one-fourth (26.1%) felt the influence would be "moderate." The average rating for superintendents was 2.606; for board members the average was 2.535. As with most other questions, respondents from the smallest schools gave the lowest rating of responses (2.311); as school size increased the response ratings gradually increased until the officials from the largest schools had the highest perceptions (3.087). The improvement of preparation for the world of work received the highest ranking of boards and superintendents.

Will school restructuring improve the productivity of the entire educational system in general and, in particular, the student acquisition of the higher order thinking skills? The mean rating for responding superintendents was 2.508. The largest portion of the superintendents (43.5%) indicated they expected a "significant influence" to be seen in productivity. Board members responded similarly, with a mean of 2.401; the largest portion (43.7%) indicated there would be a "significant improvement" as a result of restructuring. The officials from the smallest schools had a mean response of 2.149. The average response grew with school size, and an average of 2.955 was found in the largest schools, or those from 5,000 to 30,000 student population. Overall, the improvement of productivity was ranked second by respondents.

Will school restructuring increase the ability of all students to solve problems? The largest portion (45.8%) of superintendents indicated there would be a "significant influence" derived in improved problem solving of pupils; the next largest set of responses by superintendents (27.7%) was in the category of "moderate influence." The overall mean for superintendents was

2.508. School board members responded in a similar pattern, with a mean score of 2.359. Superintendents from the smallest schools, those with enrollments under 240 pupils, had an average rating of 2.216. The rating increased as school size increased, and officials from the largest schools gave ratings that averaged 2.913. The achievement of increased problem solving skills was ranked third by respondents.

Will school restructuring increase student achievement in mathematics? Superintendents (2.399) and board members (2.331) were in general agreement that restructuring would have "moderate" to "significant" influence on mathematics achievement scores. School superintendents and board members from small schools were less enthusiastic about the potential impact of restructuring on student achievement than those in larger districts. As school size increased, there was an accompanying increase in the expected improvement in achievement as perceived by respondents. Respondents ranked the achievement of increased mathematics scores fourth.

Will school restructuring introduce a process that will serve as a long-range strategy to change the American public education system? Approximately one-third of the superintendents perceived the restructuring movement would have a "significant influence" on introducing a process that would serve as a long-range strategy to change; one-third of the superintendents indicated it would provide a "moderate influence." Board members who responded gave a similar pattern of reactions with an average of 2.176, as contrasted to the mean for superintendents of 2.255. The views of school officials increased from a low of 1.945 for those from the smallest schools of 240 pupils or less to the highest average rating of 2.485 in schools

of 1,500 to 5,000 and 2.478 in the largest schools (5,000 to 30,000). Respondents ranked the introduction of a process for changing American schools fifth.

Will school restructuring reduce the number of students who drop out of school? Superintendents (2.167) and board members (2.127) responded that restructuring would have a "moderate influence" on reducing the number of dropouts. Respondents from small schools believed restructuring would be a "small influence" on reducing dropouts (1.635). Officials from larger districts gave slightly more positive responses; respondents from the largest districts, (5,000 to 30,000) were most positive and reported a "moderate influence" (2.826). The achievement of reduced dropouts was rated sixth by respondents.

Will school restructuring help each student make sense of life, to become self-fulfilled, productive citizens? Superintendents perceived restructuring as having a "moderate influence" (2.201) on students' ability to make sense of life, and board members had an average rating of 2.085. The response rating of small school officials was 1.919. The rating increased with school size until in the largest schools (5,000 to 30,000) the average raging was 2.565. The idea that Restructuring schools to help students make sense of life was ranked seventh by respondents.

Will school restructuring increase readiness for all students to learn before they enter school? School superintendents reported they saw a moderate influence upon readiness resulting from restructuring (2.167), while board members were of a similar opinion (1.986). School officials, superintendents and boards combined, in smaller schools were again least enthusiastic about the possible influence restructuring would have on

increasing readiness for pupils to learn. The ratings showed a gradual increase in scores as school size increased, and the largest school officials tended to be the most positive (2.652); the differences, however, were not significant. While respondents felt moderately positive that school restructuring would help all students develop a readiness to learn, it was rated eighth among the 13 response items.

Will school restructuring improve the competitiveness of the American economic system? School superintendents perceived school restructuring to have a "moderate influence" (1.928) on America's competitiveness. The largest portion (44.9%) of the superintendents responded in the moderate category, which was also true for board members (40.4%) who had an overall mean of 1.979. Small school officials reflected the least enthusiasm for the influence to be derived from restructuring schools on America's competitiveness. The mean for the respondents from the smallest schools was 1.757. There was a steady increase in ratings, and school superintendents from the largest districts had a mean rating of 2.304. A less enthusiastic set of responses was given by the respondents who rated the improvement of the nation's competitiveness ninth.

Will school restructuring re-invent American education to create a totally new generation of schools for America's children? Superintendents and board members responses indicated they perceived restructuring would have a "small influence" on creating a totally new generation of schools. The mean for superintendents was 1.847 and for board members 1.817. There was, however, a wide range of responses given to the question. Overall, approximately 13 percent of the respondents said there would be "no

influence"; 25 percent said there would be a "small influence"; approximately 33 percent indicated there would be a "moderate influence; just under 25 percent perceived there would be a "significant influence; and approximately five percent suggested there would be an "accomplishment of the goal." Small school respondents were the least enthusiastic (1.548) and perceived a "small influence," while the perceptions gradually grew more positive as school size increased until respondents from the largest districts gave a "moderate influence" rating of 2.261. Reinventing education was rated tenth by respondents.

Will school restructuring provide parents with choices about which public school their youngster will attend? Just under one-fourth of the combined responses from superintendents and board members reflected they perceived school restructuring to have no influence on choice; approximately one-third of the superintendents and board members perceived there would be a small influence. The averages (superintendents 1.479 and board members 1.447) pointed to a "small influence." Unlike responses on most items, there was no pattern or relationship with respect to school size and how officials perceived the achievement of school choice through restructuring. The accomplishment of choice as a result of school restructuring was rated eleventh.

Will school restructuring eliminate or reduce the use of illegal drugs? Responding superintendents and school board members were not enthusiastic about the potential influence they perceived restructuring to have on the elimination or reduction of student use of illegal drugs. The average response for superintendents (1.299) and board members (1.234)

indicated they perceived a "small influence" to come from restructuring on the use of drugs by students. Only one in ten respondents felt highly positive about the influence restructuring would have on eliminating or reducing the use of illegal drugs. School officials from the smallest schools (enrollments of less than 240 pupils) were least confident (1.041) that restructuring would bring about a decline in the use of drugs by students; as school size increased, a slightly more positive view was expressed by school officials. Respondents in schools ranging from 1500-5000 enrollments were the most positive (1.615), with a slightly less positive view reflected by superintendents and board members from the largest schools (1.565). Overall, the reduction or elimination of drugs was not seen as a likely accomplishment of school restructuring.

Will school restructuring provide financial incentives (vouchers) to parents so they can select a private or public school of their choice? Superintendents and board members were in agreement that school restructuring would most likely have no influence on the use of vouchers. The average score for superintendents was 0.859, and for board members the average was 0.894. Approximately 45 percent of the superintendents and board members said there would be "no influence," and almost one-third said school restructuring would have a "small influence" on the use of vouchers. The use of vouchers as a result of school restructuring was not seen as a likely outcome of school restructuring.

Insert Table 3 about here

The pattern of responses of superintendents and of board members regarding the expected outcomes to be achieved from school restructuring efforts was similar on the 13 items to which they were asked to respond. Overall and when viewed by individual items there was no significant differences.

How Important Are Selected Components with Respect to School Restructuring?

The writers of the current literature regarding restructuring schools have pointed to various areas in which changes are needed if schools are to be improved in a substantial way. For example, suggestions have been made that the curriculum needs to be modified, teaching methodologies need to be changed, a greater use of technology is necessary, and schools should be organized or structured in new or different ways. Consequently, respondents were asked to give their personal opinions regarding 11 items or components related to school restructuring. They were provided a scale on which to report their perceptions which included: 0 = not important to restructuring; 1 = somewhat important to restructuring although minor; 2 = of considerable importance; 3 = of major importance; 4 = very important, essential, or key ingredient to restructuring.

"The application of technology to enhance the instructional process" was ranked first by superintendents and board members. Superintendents, however, saw the use or expanded use of technology as even more important than did board members.

"Changes in instructional methodology; the way teachers teach" was seen as the second most important ingredient for restructuring schools. Like the expanded use of technology, both superintendents and board members were in agreement regarding the importance of changing methodology; school superintendents, however, saw it as significantly more important than did board members.

"Holding students and teachers accountable for outcomes rather than grades" was the third highest ranked item of importance. Once again, superintendents saw the achievement of outcomes as significantly more important for school improvement or restructuring than did board members.

"Changes in the content of the curriculum that is currently offered to students" was the fourth ranked item by the respondents. Both superintendents and board members perceived changes in the curriculum to be needed for school restructuring. There was no significant difference between the views of superintendents and board members.

"Changes in the way staff are used; i.e.; staff differentiation, team teaching, etc." was the fifth item in the ranking given by respondents. Superintendents and board members perceived in a similar way that different approaches to staff utilization was important to school restructuring.

"More parent involvement in decision making at school" was ranked sixth in importance when considering school restructuring by superintendents and board members. The views of superintendents and board members were similar, although there was a rather wide range of responses. The acknowledgment that decisions need to be made by people closest to the situation and who hold a major stake in that which is being

considered was reflected in the sixth and the seventh ranked items of importance

"The introduction of the concept of site-based decision making" as viewed by superintendents and board members was the seventh ranked item in terms of its importance to school restructuring. Site-based decision making was viewed as important, with a mean of 2.160 on the scale where 4.0 was the highest possible rating. No significance was found between the views of superintendents as contrasted to board members.

"Changes in the traditional school organization; for example, changing from junior high school to middle school," was viewed in a similar manner by superintendents and board members who collectively ranked the concept as eighth among the 11 listed for consideration. The importance seen in reorganizing or modifying the way in which a school is structured in terms of grade placement actually received some mixed reactions, as a wide variation of response patterns was found.

"Changes in teacher certification" was seen similarly by responding superintendents and board members. Respondents viewed the question of teacher certification as ninth in the ranking of items, and again there was a wide range of responses.

"Changes in the financing of schools; from local support to state or federal support" was viewed as the tenth ranked item by superintendents and board members. Again, a wide spread of opinions was found between the highest and lowest responses. No significant difference was found between the superintendents and board members regarding school finances and school restructuring.

"The elimination of extra-curricular activities" as a means of fostering school restructuring was not seen as appropriate by the majority of superintendents and board members. Both groups of respondents were in agreement that eliminating school activities would not contribute to the restructuring and improvement of schools.

Insert Table 4 about here

The pattern of agreement between superintendents and schoolboard members was generally consistent. Even on items where there was a statistical difference between the two groups, it was clear both groups viewed the items were important. It was simply a question of how important.

A second generalization that can be made from the information provided by the respondents is that they viewed several items as being important to the restructuring of education. No single item, or even a cluster of a few items, was seen as the key to restructuring. Thus, such a pattern of responses can be taken to suggest that respondents saw multiple factors, or a systemic approach to restructuring, as being appropriate rather than searching out a single panacea.

To What Extent Will Selected Factors Influence School Restructuring?

The researchers sought to understand the sources of ideas and influences that served as catalysts for decision makers when they considered changes in the structure of the schools. From what sources do school leaders obtain information about school restructuring? What or who might

influence the changes that could lead to restructuring in a school district? To gain information about these influences, school board presidents and superintendents were asked to consider the importance of specific, selected factors as they related to restructuring efforts in their local school districts. The selected factors were drawn from the literature on school reform and included such items as the use of research about educational reform, actions of state legislatures, increased parental decision making, and the actions of special interest groups. The five point scale respondents used to report their perceptions ranged from 0—"not important to restructuring" to 4—very important, essential, or key ingredient to restructuring."

School board members and school superintendents were asked for their perceptions of the importance of selected factors as influences on school restructuring in their local school districts (see Table 5). Their responses ranged from "somewhat important" to "of major importance"; however, neither group rated any of the factors as "very important."

Insert Table 5 about here

School board members and superintendents were in agreement about their perceptions of the top five influences on restructuring in their local school districts. The three factors that received the highest ranking were: (1) local school board and administrative decisions received a combined mean of 3.113 and was the only item to receive a ranking "of major importance"; (2) actions of the state legislature received a combined mean of 2.703; and (3) the combined mean of successful restructuring experiences of other schools

was 2.460. Among these three items, there was no significant difference in the mean scores of administrators or board members. The factors that ranked as the fourth and fifth most important in influencing school restructuring at the local school district level were the role of educational research and the increased role of parents in decision making,, respectively. Educational research rated a combined mean of 2.291. with superintendents rating it only slightly higher (2.328) than board members (2.232). Parental decision-making rated a combined mean of 2.131 which indicated it was of considerable importance as an influencing factor.

There was no significant difference in the means of school board presidents or superintendents concerning the factor they ranked as least likely to influence school restructuring at the local level: the influence of special interest groups. School superintendents and school board members ranked it last of the 11 items. The rating of the superintendents (1.565) was somewhat higher than school board members (1.479); the combined mean was 1.535. Given the large amount of publicity received by special interest groups during the past several years, the eleventh place ranking by board presidents and superintendents was surprising. Conservative groups have opposed outcome-based education, critical thinking, and AIDS education as a part of health education programs. Yet, despite all of the media attention, school board presidents and superintendents rated their influence between "somewhat important, although minor" and "considerable." Special interest groups were perceived by respondents in this study as the least likely group to influence restructuring at the local level.

There was a significant difference between the perceptions of school board members and superintendents on one item on the list of selected factors: information about school restructuring in professional journals. School board members ranked the item tenth in importance with a mean of 1.648, while superintendents ranked it eighth with a mean of 1.958. A two-way ANOVA revealed a significant difference in the rankings of the two groups at .0019 level. Superintendents rated information from professional journals as significantly more important than did the school board presidents.

What Current Areas of Emphasis Are Associated with School Restructuring?

In an attempt to determine the key words or terms that school board members and superintendents associated with school restructuring they were asked, "Do you associate the following terms with school restructuring?" They were provided with three options for responses: yes, no, and no opinion. The 12 terms that were selected for this question were frequently found in articles about school restructuring in professional journals, news magazines, or newspapers. The positive response was weighted as 1, the negative response was weighted as 2, and no opinion was accorded 3 points.

Information about the words or terms school board members and school superintendents associated with school restructuring is shown in Table 6.

Insert Table 6 about here

Outcome-based education, strategic planning, cooperative learning, site-based decision making, and total quality management were the five terms that school board members and superintendents associated most closely with the topic of school restructuring. Outcome-based education was clearly the term most often identified with school restructuring. While both board members and superintendents associated the term or practice with school restructuring, superintendents perceived it as significantly more important than did board members ($p = .0064$). Of the five terms the board members and superintendents associated most closely with school restructuring, outcome-based education and cooperative learning are related to curriculum and instruction. The remaining three terms, strategic planning, site-based management, and total quality management, are processes associated with how the organization works.

On the other hand, The New America Schools Corporation and the Edison Project were not equated with school restructuring. In fact, there were numerous "no opinion" responses from both board members and school superintendents to these two items. The terms had combined means of 2.105 and 2.367, respectively, which indicated a negative to no opinion rating from board members and superintendents. Board members were less convinced than superintendents that the New America School Corporation was associated with school restructuring; a significant difference of $p = .0086$ was found.

There were somewhat neutral responses to distance learning and community service as a graduation requirement as indicated by their combined means. The superintendents, however, associated distance

learning with restructuring more significantly than did board members; the level of significance was .0000. Distance learning is a tool that many schools currently employee as a method to enhance curriculum. Smaller school have taken advantage of satellite programs to enhance science, mathematics, and foreign language programs. Community service may not have been viewed as a new concept, yet, as a requirement for graduation, it has received considerable attention in recent months. Neither board members nor school superintendents perceived it as a being strongly associated with school restructuring.

School choice and vouchers were not perceived as options for school restructuring by board members or superintendents. The mean scores of both groups placed the items in the "no" category in terms their consideration as terms used to identify school restructuring. The superintendents were more adamant about not associating vouchers with restructuring than were board presidents. A level of significance of .0006 was noted when the responses of the two groups were compared. Almost 69 percent of the superintendents responded in the negative compared to only 33 percent of the board members. School board members assigned more "no opinion" responses to these two items than did superintendents.

What is not apparent from this study are reasons that explain why respondents rated the items the way they did. For example, school choice and vouchers have been controversial subjects with public school administrators and boards of education in the past. It is not clear whether the responses provided to the questions about school choice and vouchers in this in this study clearly reflected a non-association with school restructuring or a

dissatisfaction with the concept of choice and voucher systems. Perhaps those two issues have been discussed by educators and boards of education in terms of their political ramifications rather than for their implications as tools for school restructuring.

How Extensive Do Changes in the Educational System Need to Be?

Some change advocates have suggested literally throwing the baby out with the wash as they have suggested that only major changes to rebuild a completely new educational structure will suffice. The suggestion has also been made that for substantive change to take place changes will be required in all the major components of the total system rather than simply trying to change isolated components or subsystems (Sarason, 1990; Sybouts, 1992). By contrast, some observers have viewed the need for change quite differently and held to the position that few or no substantive changes are needed. To gain some insight into the perceptions of superintendents and board members with regard to how extensive they see needed changes in education, they were asked: "Do most or all of the major components of the current system need to be changed?" "Do only selected components need to be changed?" "Are major changes needed?" As reported in Table 7 approximately two-thirds of the respondents felt that only selected components of the current educational system needed to be changed or reformed, and less than one-third expressed the view that no major changes were needed. Less than 1 in 20 school officials took the position that most or all of the major components of the current educational system needed to be changed.

Insert Table 7 about here

The Perceptions of the Overall Impact of School Reform

Respondents were asked to give their views on a five-point scale (0 = no impact; 1 = very limited impact; 2 = of considerable impact; 3 = of major impact; 4 = extensive impact) concerning the extent the current emphasis on school restructuring would positively affect students. would improve the results of schools at the national level, and the degree restructuring would improve their local school (see Table 8).

Insert Table 8 about here

There were no significant differences found in how board members viewed the question of impact as contrasted to views reported by superintendents. Different polls, from time to time, have suggested respondents generally feel better about their local school than they do about the national educational scene. Respondents in this survey were more inclined to see positive results emerging from school restructuring at the local level than at the national level. While there was no significant differences between the views of respondents regarding expected results, the tendency was found for expectations to be higher regarding local results than those anticipated at the national level.

Conclusions

Superintendents and board members were in general agreement on issues associated with school restructuring. Even when significant differences were found between superintendents and board members, they tended to reflect the degree of differences between agreements and did not point to disagreement with respect to positive vs. negative perceptions.

School officials were in agreement about key words they used to describe school reform and factors influencing school reform. Outcome-based education, strategic planning, cooperative learning, site-based decision making, and total quality management were viewed as the top five descriptors of school restructuring techniques or ideas. School vouchers, home schooling, the New America Schools Corporation, and the Edison Project were not reported as terms associated with school reform. It is interesting to note that three of the last four terms mentioned above were associated with the intervention of government or private enterprise in public education. The respondents acknowledged research about education and the increased role of parental decision making as positive influences to restructuring.

If one of the goals of school reform has been to rekindle a sense of purpose for the American education system and to shake it loose from its agricultural/industrial past, the respondents of this survey indicated such a shift may be slowly emerging. Board members and superintendents indicated "improved preparation for the world of work," "student acquisition of higher-order thinking skills," and "an increase in the ability of all students to solve problems" were likely results of school reform. In a sense, the

responses indicated a very minor shift from the traditional expectations of the school. However, the acquisition of higher-order thinking skills and problem solving could be translated to the information age quite easily. On a less enthusiastic note, school officials were neutral about the ability of school reform processes to "help students make sense of life," "increase the readiness of students to learn before they enter school," and "improve the competitiveness of the American economic system." Perhaps these issues are too complex for a single school district to hold as goals.

In general, education officials from schools with 500 or less students viewed school restructuring less positively than did those schools of 1500 students or more. On some issues, however, there was almost complete agreement among board members and superintendents, regardless of the size school they represented. For example, the elimination of school activities was not viewed as appropriate to bring about school reform; it was ranked last of the 11 items listed as related to school restructuring. Second, vouchers and school choice were not viewed positively as potential accomplishments related to school restructuring. Finally, respondents from both groups indicated very little hope for school restructuring to eliminate or reduce the use of illegal drugs by young people.

On one hand, the responses of school officials reflected a pattern that tended to be supportive of many of the perceived outcomes of school restructuring. When they were asked, however, to react to how extensive the changes needed to be in order to facilitate restructuring, the paradox was evident. Only slightly more than four percent of the board members and superintendents indicated most or all of the current components of the

educational system needed to be changed; approximately two-thirds of the school officials responded that only selected components of the system needed changing; and almost one-third of the superintendents and one-fourth of the board members said no major changes were needed in the current educational system.

Reflecting on the paradoxical nature of the responses raised several questions. While one cannot make sweeping conclusions from the results of a single study, it was apparent that the latest round of school restructuring (reform) might be just that--another attempt to change what many perveive ought not to be changed. When the responses of superintendents and school board members were studied, the reserarchers immediately rraised two questions: Is the elementary and secondary school system perceived as connected, in any way, to what happens in the mainstream of American life? Is the system too big and too old to change?

First, it is entirely conceivable that elementary and secondary education suffers from a lack of connection with the other subsystems of the greater society. Education of the young was perceived first and foremost as a local responsibility, entrusted to local officials. The majority of school officials perceived their own decisions at the local level to be the most influential in restructuring schools, followed by actions of the state legislature, and studying the successes of other restructured schools. While this may be true, it causes one to inquire about the locally held definition of the meaning and purpose of an education and whether that definition extends to issues that impact the national and international scene.

Second, the idea that an entire system, elementary and secondary education, might have to be radically adjusted to meet the needs of people in the coming decades appears to be a notion that lacked support among school superintendents and board of education members. Perhaps, the idea of changing an enterprise as traditional and as large as education is too much to imagine.

Change may be slow in coming to the public education arena if it is left to those on the "inside" to facilitate reform. If that is the case, school reform may be left to those groups identified as special interests: businesses, government, religious associations, and community activists. These are the same special interest groups superintendents and school board members ranked least likely to influence school restructuring at the local level.

References

American Association of School Administrators. 1991. Developing Leaders for Restructuring Schools: New Habits of Heart and Mind. Arlington, VA: AASA.

Clements, M. 1993. "What's Wrong With Our Schools?" Parade Magazine (May 16): 4-5.

Deal, T. E. and L. Bolman. 1991. Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice, and Leadership. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Education Commission of the States. 1992. Keeping the Promises of Reform: The Policy Puzzle (Introductory materials in the program of the 1992 National Forum and Annual Meeting of the ECS). Denver: ECS.

Fullen, M. C. and M. B. Miles. 1992. "Getting Reform Right: What Works and What Doesn't," Kappan (June): 746.

Green, J. 1987. The Next Wave: A Synopsis of Recent Education Reform Reports (Bulletin TR-87-1). Denver: Education Commission of the States.

McCune, S. 1987. Unpublished Paper. Presented at the Mid-continent Research Educational Laboratory Summer Institute, Breckenridge, CO.

Moorman, H. and J. Ergermier. Restructuring the Schools: Problems and Prospects, eds. Lane and Epps. Berkeley: McCuthan Publishing.

The National Commission on Excellence. 1984. A Nation at Risk. Cambridge, MA: The Commission.

Sarason, S. B. 1990. The Predictable Failure of Educational Reform. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Seely, D. S. (Ed.). 1992. "Are These the New American Schools?" Equity and Choice, 8 (3): 5.

Sybouts, W. 1992. Planning in School Administration. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.

Van Loozen, J. 1984. A Blueprint for Educational Excellence: A School Board Member's Guide. Washington, D.C.: National School Boards Association.

Table 1

Number and Percent of Questionnaires Returned from Superintendents and Board Members

	Board Presidents			Superintendents			
	No. of Districts Sampled	No. of Returns	Percent Return	No. of Districts Sampled	No. of Returns	Percent Return	Total No. of Returns
Colorado	21	9	42.8	21	15	71.4	24
Iowa	94	37	39.3	94	67	71.3	104
Kansas	62	24	38.7	62	49	79.0	73
Missouri	81	37	45.6	81	56	69.1	93
Nebraska	58	25	44.2	58	40	68.9	65
South Dakota	35	10	30.5	35	29	82.8	39
Wyoming	11	2	25.7	11	10	93.2	12
Totals	362	144	39.8	362	266	73.5	410

Table 2

Number and Percentage of Districts by School Size in the Responding Seven-State Area

School District Enrollment Category		Number of Responses	Percent of Responses
Smallest schools	79- 240	74	18.4
	241- 500	111	27.1
	501-1500	136	33.2
	1501-5000	66	16.1
Largest schools	5000+	23	5.6
Totals		410	100.4

Table 3

Summary of Responses from Superintendents and Board Members Regarding Their Perceptions of What Restructuring Will Accomplish

	Superintendents X	Board Members X
Improve preparation of students to enter world of work	2.606	2.535
Improve productivity of the entire educational system and higher order thinking skills	2.508	2.401
Increase ability of students to solve problems	2.508	2.359
Increase student achievement in mathematics	2.399	2.331
Introduce a long-term strategy to change public education system	2.255	2.176
Reduce the number of students who drop out of school	2.167	2.127
Help each student make sense of life	2.201	2.085
Increase readiness for students to learn before they enter school	2.167	1.986
Improve competitiveness of American economic system	1.928	1.979
Re-invent American education	1.847	1.817
Provide parents with a choice about which public school their youngster will attend (school choice)	1.479	1.447

Table 3 (continued)

	Superintendents X	Board Members X
Eliminate or reduce the use of illegal drugs	1.299	1.234
Provide financial incentives (vouchers) to parents so they can select a private or public school of their choice	0.859	0.894

Table 4

Superintendent and Board Member Ratings of How Important Selected Items Were to Restructuring Schools

Ranking	Item	Mean	SD	Group Mean Board	Group Mean Supt.	Level of Significance
1	Application of Technology	3.034	.833	186.59	213.43	.0183*
2	Teaching Methods	2.929	.989	182.39	215.71	.0041**
3	Outcomes	2.817	1.058	171.64	219.93	.0000**
4	Change Curriculum	2.601	1.039			ns
5	Staff Development	2.545	1.004			ns
6	Parental Involvement	2.297	1.093			ns
7	Site-based Management	2.160	1.096			ns
8	Change Organization	2.002	1.143			ns
9	Change Teacher Certification	1.975	1.129			ns
10	Change School Finance	1.871	1.206			ns
11	Eliminate School Activities	0.628	0.067			ns

*Significant at the .05 level; **Significant at the .01 level

Table 5

Factors Influencing School Restructuring at the Local School Level as Perceived by School Board Members and Superintendents

Factor	Combined Rank	Combined Mean	Board Member Rank	Board Member Mean	Superintendent Rank	Superintendent Mean	Level of Sig.
Decisions of the local school board or administration	1	3.148	1	3.049	1	3.148	ns
Actions of the state legislature	2	2.703	2	2.697	2	2.706	ns
The successes of restructuring experiences in other schools	3	2.460	3	2.362	3	2.153	ns
Research about education reform	4	2.291	4	2.232	4	2.328	ns
Increased role of parental decision making in schools	5	2.131	7	2.021	5	2.190	ns
Student performance on standardized tests	6	2.099	5	2.169	6	2.061	ns
Federal mandates for a national curriculum	7	2.012	6	2.122	8	1.954	ns
Information about restructuring in professional journals	8	1.849	10	1.648	8	1.958	.0019*
Educational consultants	9	1.841	9	1.721	7	1.905	ns
State, regional, or national professional education associations	10	1.792	8	1.908	10	1.730	ns
Special interest groups	11	1.535	11	1.479	11	1.565	ns

*Significant at the .05 level

Table 6

Words or Terms Associated With School Restructuring

Factor	Combined Rank	Combined Mean	Board Member Rank	Board Member Mean	Superintendent Rank	Superintendent Mean	Level of Sig.
Outcome-based education	1	1.099	1/2	1.176	1	1.057	.0064*
Strategic planning	2	1.182	1/2	1.176	2	1.185	ns
Cooperative learning	3	1.252	3	1.254	4	1.251	ns
Site-based decision making	4	1.272	4	1.352	3	1.229	ns
Total quality management	5	1.365	5	1.408	5	1.341	ns
Community service as a graduation requirement	6	1.535	6	1.648	7	1.473	ns
Distance learning	7	1.548	8	1.908	6	1.347	.0000**
School choice	8	1.757	7	1.725	8/9	1.774	ns
Vouchers	9	1.906	9/10	2.014	8/9	1.774	.0006**
Home schooling	10	1.985	9/10	2.014	10	1.847	ns
The New America Schools Corportation	11	2.105	11	2.263	11	2.016	.0086*
The Edison Project	12	2.367	12	2.531	12	2.206	ns

*Significant at the .05 level; **Significant at the .01 level

Table 7

School Officials Perceptions About the Need for Extensive Changes in the Educational System

Change	Board Members		Superintendents	
	No.	%	No.	%
Most or all components need to be changed	6	4.5	10	4.2
Only selected components need to be changed	93	69.4	156	65.0
No major changes are needed	35	26.1	74	30.8
Totals	134	100.0	240	100.0

Table 8

Perceptions of School Officials Concerning the Impact of School Restructuring on Students and Schools at the National and Local Levels

	Level of Impact									
	None		Limited		Considerable		Major		Extensive	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Effect on student	6	1.6	86	22.8	145	38.7	101	26.8	38	10.1
Impact at national level	8	2.1	124	32.8	146	38.6	71	18.8	29	7.7
Impact at local district level	10	2.7	81	21.5	133	35.1	87	23.1	66	17.5